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ABSTRACT

Benefits of collaborative learning as achieved in peer tutoring approaches are considered, and the suggestion is made that partner learning may be just as beneficial for disabled and normal adults as it is for children. Research is reviewed on the benefits of partner learning for all parties involved: for the tutee (increased individualized attention, increased contact and opportunity for closeness with the instructor and corresponding learning efficiency, influence of a role model, and gains in self-esteem); for the tutor (increased subject area knowledge, improved social skills and self-esteem, and the opportunity to help others); and for the teacher (help with individualized instruction, increased attention for low performers, cost-effectiveness, and increased positive interactions between teachers and students). Research on partner learning effects on adults is limited, but the possibilities for effective use of adult teaming situations should be considered. (CL)

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# Partner Learning in Educational Settings: Taking a Cue From the Kids

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There is abundant research on the effectiveness of children in partner learning situations (peer tutoring). From this research it is evident that a partnership can be a powerful tool for promoting optimal learning and performance. While professionals (adults) working in educational settings have also entered into partner learning situations, the literature on the effectiveness of these adults is sparce. Most of the available research to date has dealt with the benefits of partner learning for kids. After we had examined this research, we began to speculate on the advantages of similar collaborative working relationships for adults. The few studies that deal with adult "peer tutoring" are presented to support our speculations and set the stage for future research efforts.

Introduction

Traditional modes of learning in our schools have placed emphasis on individualizing instruction, i.e., self-paced instruction and competition. Traditional grading systems and honor rolls foster competition.. Students involved in spelling bees and other learning games are in competition with one another. "While the spotlight has been on the ways that students interact with materials and the role of the teacher, very little attention has been given to how students should relate to each other while working on instructional tasks" (Johnson, 1975). Competitive and individualized learning situations focus on "getting it right." These approaches to learning are outcome rather than process-oriented.

The collaborative learning mode, on the other hand, focuses on learning as a cooperative undertaking and addresses the process as well as the outcome. People working together in helping relationships share not only the answers, but the processes used to derive the answers also.

Coleman, in Youth: Transition to Adulthood (1974), examines environments available for young persons while making the transition to adulthood. He states that youth should have an opportunity for responsibilities that affect the lives of other people. Through experiences such as caring for younger persons, the child learns the kind of behavior required of a socially responsible adult. The opportunity to be involved in helping relationships has traditionally not been available in our schools. There is evidence that youth involved in volunteer service such as the Peace Corps (Gilletts, 1968) benefited personally as well as professionally from the experience. "Only with the experience of such responsibilities can youth

move toward the mutally responsible and mutually rewarding involvement with others that constitutes social maturity" (Coleman, 1974, p. 3).

Entering into a partnership, then, can have rewards which extend beyond the term of the project. People working together may complete a specified assignment and might acquire valuable interpersonal skills as well. Since effective communication skills are central to the success of the collaborative learning mode, they can become a focus of the training.

There is an abundance of knowledge and expertise around us, if we only knew how to get the most out of our partnerships. Good partnerships don't just happen. Helping relationships must be carefully structured.

## BENEFITS OF PARTNER LEARNING FOR STUDENTS

Entering into a partnership has many benefits which are well documented in the research literature. The most obvious for both partners is skill acquisition. In partnerships which take the form of peer and cross-age tutoring, both the tutor and the tutee have been shown to acquire academic skills.

### Benefits for the Tutee

Research findings have consistently shown that students do make significant academic gains after being tutored by other students. In general, benefits for the tutee fall into four categories:

1. Increased individualized attention

   Peer tutoring is a classic example of the one-to-one teaching situation, where the material to be learned can be closely matched to the learner's level on a sequence of skills. In addition, in a one-to-one situation, there are more immediate and frequent opportunities for the tutee to receive praise and/or

corrections on her performance.

In a study conducted by Jenkins, et al. (1974), students acquired more skills when a peer (partner) was conducting one-to-one instruction then when teachers taught small groups.

2. Increased contact and opportunity for closeness with the instructor and corresponding learning efficiency.

An examination of the social interaction occurring within partnerships reveals that the emotional component may be an important factor contributing to learning. A bond of friendship can develop between the tutor and the tutee which enhances the instructional situation.

In a classroom situation, teachers often have no more to go on than facial expressions and gestures (non-verbal cues) as indicators of student understanding.

The fact that children spend time with each other facilitates their ability to decipher their own non-verbal behavior. Thus, children may be more skilled than adults in interpreting non-verbal cues indicative of another child's comprehension.

The results of a study by Allen and Feldman (1975) showed that children were more sensitive than adults to non-verbal cues indicative of a child's comprehension.

Children may be able to communicate more effectively with each other than adults can communicate with children. Thus, the material may be learned more efficiently. Schatz and Gleman (1973) found that older students made simpler and shorter

statements when speaking with younger students and made special efforts to keep interest and attention. Good and Brophy (1978) suggest that vocabulary and examples used by adults may be too complex for younger children. They also state "successful tutoring may demand direct instruction, whereas adults tend to be indirect."

Cohen and Stover (1981) conducted research which showed that the naive unprofessional students perceived word problem difficulty as a reading, rather than a math challenge. Among other things, student tutors simplified the vocabulary of math word problems, shortened information and added extra clues and a diagram in order to make them easier for other students to understand.

3. Influence of a role model

Research on one-teacher schools (Allen and Devin-Sheehnan, 1974), showed that older children felt responsible for younger ones. According to Allen and Feldman (1976), "being a role model for the younger child to imitate and 'look up to' may exert a very powerful influence on constraining the tutor's behavior along socially desirable channels."

4. Gains in self-esteem

Reserach by Lohman (1970) shows that age is positively valued by younger children. Since age is associated with valued characteristics such as increased size and strength, the younger child stands to gain in self-concept from association with an older child working in the "teacher" role.

Gains in self-concept were reported by Ross (1972) in a program that required students labeled "disadvantaged" to tutor each other.

Benefits for the Tutor

Some critics of peer tutoring have argued that the tutor is doing work which is the responsibility of the teacher and that only the tutee benefits from the partnership. However, there is abundant evidence to suggest that the tutor might profit as much or more than the child being tutored. Research indicated that tutoring experiences can sharpen the abilities of the tutor in the following areas:

1. Educational/subject areas

   Many students have superficial knowledge of a subject area to the extent that they can "get it right" on the test. To teach another person, however, requires a deeper understanding of a math concept or work-attack skills. Thus, being a tutor should enhance the child's own academic abilities. In a study by Dineen, Clark and Risley (1977), results indicated that tutoring a peer increased the tutors' spelling performance nearly as much as being tutored by a peer.

2. Self-esteem

   Being associated with the prestigious role of being a teacher can go a long way toward increasing a child's self-esteem and positive attitudes toward school. Studies conducted in schools suggest that tutors judge themselves as being more competent in school after teaching another child. Gartner, Kohler and Riessman (1971) were more intrigued by changes in social behavior, attitudes and self-concept for the child doing

the tutoring than by improvement in learning.

3. Social Skills

In order to deal successfully with other persons, social skills are needed. These skills may appear to fall into the "common sense" category, because of the rather obvious importance of cooperation in adult success. Social/interpersonal skills are, in fact, rarely the focus of actual classroom instruction. Schools often give students many opportunities to carry out cooperative activities without specific instruction as to how to do so. Students who are trained to work as tutors (using roleplaying, for example), can be taught essential interpersonal skills such as giving statements of praise, encouragement, and affirmation. Students should also be taught how to give constructive criticism, make specific corrections and be assertive rather than aggressive. A critical component of the training in social skills is instruction in active listening. The technique of roleplaying has been evaluated by many studies as a training tool. Argyle (1969) found roleplaying to be effective in improving professional skills. In assertion training for students, various kinds of modeling, coaching and roleplay have been successful (Friedman, 1972).

4. The helping relationship

The most salient characteristic of the role of teacher is helping another person. In our schools, students are typically the recipients of help from others rather than the givers. In

terms of socialization, a possible positive consequence of placing students in the teacher role is that they derive beneficial psychological dividends as a result of helping another person. It may be that feelings of increased personal competence led to results which showed more self-acceptance/awareness and tolerance of others (Halzberg, Knapp and Turner, 1966).

BENEFITS TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT PERSON (TEACHER)

1. Individualizing instruction

As we have mentioned previously, partner learning is an eminent example of individualized instruction in which students work together to achieve educational objectives.

2. Partnerships for the teachers

The task facing professionals who are expected to teach groups of children with diverse social and academic needs is awesome. The implementation of P.L. 94-142 had led many teachers to seek mutual assistance in the form of partnerships. In many cases, this has led to consulting and professional pairing to work toward the common goal of educating children with handicaps with their normal peers to the greatest extent possible. Teachers who develop professional partnerships in schools will find rewards which extend beyond teaching together in classrooms to developing quality relationships with their colleagues. Using each other as resources, teaching partners can cooperatively plan the curriculum, devise new teaching strategies and go together to the "front line" of the classroom to take risks in using their new strategies with the students. Where strategies

need revision, team-partners can collaborate to improve their technology. Working together to achieve a common goal, teaching partners can congratulate each other on their successes and cooperatively brainstorm for solutions to their problems. Teaching in a classroom can be lonely business, especially in schools which are physically and organizationally structured to exclude opportunities for colleagues to work together during the school day.

3. Increasing individualized attention for low performers

"Peer tutoring takes pressure off the teacher by allowing him to teach a large group of students; at the same time, it allows the slow learners the individual attention they need" (Johnson, 1975).

Because of time and class size constraints, few teachers have the luxury of providing much classroom time to individual students. In fact, there is some evidence that teachers who provide individualized instruction to one or two students are less effective overall in terms of achievement gains for the class than teachers who work with small or large groups (Stallings and Kaskowitz, 1974). As long as individual students have different learning rates, students will be forced into situations where they either have to proceed to the next skill in the sequence without having mastered the current objectives, or they have to wait for the rest of the class to reach their level of mastery. By its very nature, grouping for instruction will always mean that one or two students are not working on the skill which is appropriate for them at taht moment and

are, therefore, spending less time focused on the tasks they need. Thus, it follows that time students spend on appropriate tasks could be increased by increasing the number of people who can work with individual students. Structuring peer tutoring partnerships in the classroom is one way for teachers to expand their arsenal of available resources to stretch the system and increase the likelihood that students will be receiving the individual attention they need.

For low performing students, the opportunity to deal actively with the subject matter is expanded if teachers present material to groups of students first, with time allowed for students to work in pairs following the group presentation. Thus, slow learners are not only exposed to the material, but they have increased time working in a partnership to listen, to respond and to use the new material. It is this repetition which is the critical variable for low-performing students, the chance to increase the time during which they are actively engaged with the academic material. If a low performing fourth grader is allowed to teach the math facts (s)he has just learned to a second grader, the process of teaching the new material to another student acts as a powerful reinforcer of the material already learned. In one study (Cloward, 1967), where low performing high school students worked as tutors for low achieving elementary students, the tutored children made moderate growth. However, the tutors themselves also progressed in their skill development and the researchers concluded that the tutors had learned from the experience of teaching others.

4. Positive attitudes

The research strongly supports the proposition that partner learning encourages positive interpersonal relationships among students and between students and teacher (Weigel, Wiser and Cook, 1974). "Positive interpersonal relations with students are necessary both for effective problem-solving in groups and for general classroom enjoyment of instructional activity" (Johnson, 1975, p. 188). Student attitudes and achievements in math were found to be more positive when students had been studying with each other than when they had been studying individually (Johnson, et al., 1977). The results of this math study indicated that partner learning promoted positive attitudes towards peers and teachers. An increase in self-esteem and higher scholastic achievement was also noted. A review of the research by Slavin (1980) found, among other things, that cooperative learning methods produce general mutual concern among students and liking of school. According to Johnson and Johnson (1981), working cooperatively with peers creates, among other things, "more mutual concern and friendliness for other students, more attentiveness to peers, more feelings of obligation to and responsibility for classmates, a greater desire to win the respect of other students, and stronger beliefs that one is liked, supported, and accepted by other students" (p. 74).

5. Cost-Effectiveness

Program costs are another factor which deserve attention in connection with partner learning rationale. For programs to be

considered cost-effective, they must first be effective. In one model cost-effectiveness study (Armstong, Stahlbrand, Conlon, and Pierson, 1979), high school seniors were trained to work with special education students in math. Results showed that trained tutors and paraprofessional adults were equally effective in producing student achievement, but that expenses associated with the paraprofessionals were over three times greater than those for the high school tutors.

There is an abundance of research supporting the reciprocal benefits of partner learning for young learners. The aforementioned studies serve to illustrate a number of applications of the concept to date. In the next section we will discuss partner learning applications for adults.

Benefits of Partner Learning for Teachers

"Human culture...is a group culture. We tend to live in groups, we work in groups, we play in groups The solutions to most of our problems are found in group living..." (Culver & Hoben, 1973). Teachers share common problems, needs and the responsibility for improving instruction. Thus, teachers need to come together as colleagues and help each other grow in their fields.

Attempts to examine partner learning with adults have involved university students preparing to be teachers (Pierce, 1979). Two juniors were assigned to work together in a classroom four mornings per week for a full semester. The partners were observed utilizing frequent tutoring sessions and immediate feedback techniques. Additionally, they seemed to thrive on the personal-social aspects of their partnership. Their educational process was one of support rather than competition as they moved

toward their goal of becoming professionals. Their performance surpassed the goals of the university for a first practicum experience and the partners both showed tremendous gains in self-confidence.

Other research involving adults has focused on in-service training for teachers. Joyce & Showers (1980) indicated that most in-service training is delivered via workshops where staff members are taught new teaching techniques in one or two sessions. These researchers suggested that we need to take a hard look at how we are spending in-service training dollars and time, because they said that very little of what happens in one or two sessions ever finds its way into the classroom. Their research focuses on a sequence of steps for in-service training which, if followed, yield a high rate of transfer of new skills into the classroom. These steps are: 1) theory-presentation of new strategy; 2) demonstration of its use in the classroom; 3) practice using the skill; 4) feedback on initial attempts to use the skill; and 5) coaching to assure mastery in using the new technique. Staff members of Project IMPACT (Knight, Willard, Stahlbrand, Moore, Oaks and Meyers, 1981) used these five components of in-service training with the result of effective staff development and changes in the classroom to benefit all students. Teachers who conducted team-taught classes as part of Project IMPACT developed professional partnerships. These teachers had a shared purpose which focused on improving instruction for low performing students. As a result both members increased their skills, their sense of self-esteem and their social skills. Working together side by side in a daily basis in the regular classroom and meeting weekly to adopt and plan the curriculum, regular class teachers (English, Math and Social Studies) and special educators used their diverse strengths to support a cooperative effort as members of a

team. This positive interdependence resulted from the fact that contributions made to the enterprise could capitalize on the specialized but different expertise of each member. This colleagial approach to the task made the partners committed to their task, and the interaction that took place during the collaborative planning atd monitoring led to an awareness by participants of their own resources and thus increased their self-esteem.

Another example of a professional collaborative endeavor was a project conducted by Stahlbrand, Moore and Willard under the direction of Armstrong and Kucij in 1981-82. Professional staff from these school districts in Vermont including central office personnel, principals, department heads and teachers focused on the training needs of all professionals in their districts. The result was training and implementation of learning strategies which improved instruction for the student population. The steps used in this project were consistent with the five steps which Joyce & Showers indicated would result in effective in-service.

School district personnel need to take a hard look at the successful collaborations which have been used to date. Teachers at all levels need to help each other grow. Working with each other their communication skills will improve which will help them to work more effectively with each other in the future. When teachers believe that they have the support of their administrators in this effort, they are more likely to translate theory learned during in-service training into classroom settings. According to Johnson & Johnson (1980), successful in-service training programs actually create these "collaborative support groups" to help teachers use new strategies and techniques in the classroom after the in-service program has ended. When teachers work together on a task they share a joint

purpose. Because each teacher brings her own talents to the group, the result is usually better than what any one teacher could have achieved alone. Sharing resources and planning together, teachers gain a sense of personal power which gives them confidence that they will be able to solve any problems which arise as they carry out their plan. The professional collaboratives might offer the most efficient and cost-effective way to keep up with the profession and to develop teaching and research skills. Partner learning is an exceedingly powerful technique which has not been fully explored. Among other things, future research should focus on the effective use of teaming situations: 1) beginning teachers could be paired with experienced teachers, and 2) teachers and administrators from various disciplines and levels could form collaborative working relationships. Other research efforts could address the use of those interdisciplinary teams to find workable solutions to system-wide problems. Thus, the same effects of partnerships which have proven beneficial for kids would be translated into adult learning situations. We need to take a cue from the kids!

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